

## Cravings and Conflicts 10-9-05

James 4:1-12 (NIV)

We going to take a week off of our Matthew series so that I can share a message that I heard recently by C.J. Mahaney. Every once in awhile, someone divides the word of truth so clearly and applies it so aptly to our lives that it changes the way we see our daily life. (2 Timothy 2:15) This was the case for me with Pastor Mahaney's message on James 4. When the Holy Spirit is allowed to transform the way we think, that in turn changes the way we act. (1 Timothy 4:13-15) That is my goal for us each Sunday. Mahaney appropriately entitled his sermon *Cravings and Conflicts*. Would you stand with me as we read God's word?

*<sup>1</sup>What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? <sup>2</sup>You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. <sup>3</sup>When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. <sup>4</sup>You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup>Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? <sup>6</sup>But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." <sup>7</sup>Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup>Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup>Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. <sup>11</sup>Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. <sup>12</sup>There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbor?*

There is a connection with our series in Matthew. Last week we began the section of Jesus' dealings with the religious leaders. I told you about an insidious disease called Pharaseeitis. The symptom is judging everyone around you while being too proud to see your own sin. This passage in James addresses the cure for Pharaseeitis. Do not judge your brother. Refuse to slander others. Verse 12 ends with a question we should ask ourselves before we say anything negative about anyone or any organization. Who are you to judge your neighbor? (Matthew 7:1)

Instead of judging others, we are to submit to God. We resist the devil, who is also known as the accuser of the brethren. (Revelation 12:10) We draw near to God. When we do, He comes near to us. Then we clean up our own act, wash our own hands, realizing that we are the sinner. That is one of the affects of coming into God's presence. We see our own faults. (Isaiah 6:5) If we are focused on others' faults, we are probably enveloped with self and not the Lord. But in God's presence, we seek to purify our own hearts. We recognize our own double-mindedness. We

**Commented [notes1]:** <sup>15</sup> Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.  
2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes2]:** <sup>13</sup> Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.

<sup>14</sup> Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

<sup>15</sup> Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.  
1 Timothy 4:13-15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes3]:** <sup>1</sup> "Do not judge, or you too will be judged."  
Matthew 7:1 (NIV)

**Commented [notes4]:** <sup>10</sup> And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.  
Revelation 12:10 (KJV)

**Commented [notes5]:** <sup>5</sup> "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."  
Isaiah 6:5 (NIV)

look inward to see what changes the Lord would make in our own hearts, instead of pointing our finger at others' faults. (James 3:9-10)

**Commented [notes6]:** <sup>9</sup> With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.  
<sup>10</sup> Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.  
James 3:9-10 (NIV)

The passage begins with question. *What causes fights and quarrels among you?* This is what I believe the Lord would have us focus on this morning. Personal conflicts are an inevitable part of daily life. It does not matter if you are young or old, employer or employee, married or single, during this week you will face personal conflict. It is these conflicts that can ruin our day, our career, and even our marriage. They can have devastating affects on our mental, physical, and spiritual health. So what is the source of these conflicts? If we understand the source, we can do some of that introspection we saw near the end of the passage and limit the damage. (Psalm 4:4)

**Commented [notes7]:** <sup>4</sup> In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Selah  
Psalms 4:4 (NIV)

In our passage for today, God graciously corrects our idyllic view of ourselves and identifies the root issues. (Psalm 39:11) In doing so, He provides us with life transforming wisdom for resolving the personal conflicts we so often face.

**Commented [notes8]:** <sup>11</sup> You rebuke and discipline men for their sin; you consume their wealth like a moth-- each man is but a breath. Selah  
Psalms 39:11 (NIV)

The people that James was writing to must have been experiencing the fights and quarrels mentioned. Notice both verbs are plural. It does not sound like a very happy church family. In spite of being born again, they had these conflicts. James was writing to address the problems and give them a handle on why they were experiencing them. In addressing them, he also gives us insight into eternal truth about the nature of man. (Romans 1:28-31)

**Commented [notes9]:** <sup>28</sup> Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

You might guess by the substance of the letter what these fights and quarrels were about, but James did not specify. His Spirit led observation can apply to any fight or quarrel. The issue is not the main thing. The source is! Here is what we can learn.

<sup>29</sup> They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,  
<sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;  
<sup>31</sup> they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.  
Romans 1:28-31 (NIV)

**It is worse than you think.** Relational conflict is always worse than you think. Our old nature would minimize the seriousness of it. We often recall conflict from a self-flattering perspective. (Psalm 36:2) The other party is always the one that is at fault or just does not get it. Am I right so far? So, recognizing that we have the weakness of an overly flattering self-image, we can see it as a weakness and be open to the real source of the problem.

**Commented [notes10]:** <sup>2</sup> For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.  
Psalms 36:2 (NIV)

Another thing we tend to do is to minimize the problem. We use morally neutral generalities like, "We just do not get along" or "Our personalities clash" or "We are wired differently". "We have issues" is another nice way to minimize the conflict. We even think ourselves morally superior for putting it in such neutral terms.

James does not put up with that assessment for a moment. He insists that we get down to the root of the problem. What starts as the fights and quarrels, he sees as a war within. The fighting in verse one turns into coveting and murder in verse two. The Holy Spirit will not let us get away with those morally neutral versions of fights and quarrels. What God sees is sin, which is rebellion against Him. We are supposed to love one another. (John 15:17) To not do so is to rebel against God. They were

**Commented [notes11]:** <sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other.  
John 15:17 (NIV)

not carrying dead bodies out of the church. This is Jesus' view of fighting from the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5:21-22)

If we are ever going to really attempt to deal with the quarrels among us, we must be willing to see the seriousness of it in God's eyes. It is the same with any habitual sin. We must discover how abhorrent it is to God. Then we will have the will to do something about changing our lifestyle.

Think back to your last fight or quarrel. Most of us do not have to look too far back. Now consider this. Have you minimized it? Have you blamed it on the other person, or something superficial? Do you realize that it is worse than you think?

Listen to Pete Rose statement from his book on being caught betting on the games his team played in. "I'm sure that I'm supposed to act all sorry or sad or guilty now that I've accepted that I've done something wrong, but you see, I'm not built that way. So let us leave it like this. I'm sorry it happened, I'm sorry for all the people, fans, and family it hurt, let's move on."

Too often we can have the same superficial estimation of the seriousness of personal conflict in our own life. We might say, "Sure, I shouldn't have gotten so worked up, but I was right, and they were wrong. It is over, so let's just move on." If we realize we have not merely fallen short of perfection, but instead, in our pride, we have sinned against God, refused to love our neighbor as ourselves, and then made light of it, we would be quite a bit more repentant in our confession. (Psalm 32:3)

James did not say, "Just move on." This passage can transform the way you see and deal with conflict. It can change your part in it, if you will let it. We reap what we sow, and if we continue to sow unresolved conflict, things will escalate. (Galatians 6:8) The damaging affects of personal conflict will wreak havoc in your life. That is why I say it is worse than you think.

**But it is also simpler than you think.** Relational conflicts always seem complicated, but James is telling us it really is not. It is not a mystery and it is not a demonic attack. It probably does not require professional help. And the really good news is you do not have to figure out who started it and when, because that is irrelevant. Let me cut through it all and go straight to the problem. It is the passions in your heart. (Jeremiah 17:9)

The source is not somewhere outside you, or someone other than you. With the help of the Holy Spirit, James nails it right on dead center. *Your desires battle within you. You want something but don't get it. You... covet, but you cannot have what you want.* James 4:2 (NIV) There are three very clear and precise statements about the source of personal conflict. We could just call them sinful cravings.

So when we have a quarrel, it is a more serious matter than you think, but discerning the source of the problem is simpler than you think. Conflicts only reveal

**Commented [notes12]:** <sup>21</sup> "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'  
<sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.  
Matthew 5:21-22 (NIV)

**Commented [notes13]:** <sup>3</sup> When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.  
Psalms 32:3 (NIV)

**Commented [notes14]:** <sup>8</sup> The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.  
Galatians 6:8 (NIV)

**Commented [notes15]:** <sup>9</sup> The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?  
Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV)

what is already in our heart. Each relational conflict I go through reveals a sinful craving that I have. That is the source of every quarrel and fight.

Great counselors will reveal the motivation in the heart of those locked in conflict. When we can see what is behind our hard-headedness, what selfish desires are driving us to insist on our way or the highway, we find the problem is not out there where we were pointing. It is right inside our old selfish nature. How kind of God to spell it out for us like that! Or maybe you would rather not know?

James tells us that cravings underlie conflicts. It might be craving for control, for affection, respect, for power, to be vindicated or just comfortable. We crave a hassle free life. When something interrupts our plan and takes us away from the relaxation we sought, the craving for that relaxation results in a quarrel. The reason we fight is that we do not get what we want. It is really that simple.

Men, we often fight because we do not get the respect we think we deserve. Our craving for honor gets us into fights. We come home after a hard day and we want the honor of peace and quiet or being served. Never mind what kind of day our spouse had. We want, and if we do not get what we want, we quarrel. We want control. When our spouse will not let us have it, we fight for it. I could go on and on but you get the point. Wives... I had better not go there, but the same is true for you. You fight with your husband because you do not get what you want.

I can just hear it now, "But I deserve it!" Oh really? That is just another expression of cravings. Trust me, you do not want justice. Justice would have us all in hell. We are all by nature, that is the old nature, selfish, or as verse 5 says, envious. We think things like, "Why do they get it? I deserve it!"

God is certainly specific about our problem. He is not like our computer. I use my computer for simple things. I e-mail and type. I look up reference works. That is all. I am typing along and all the sudden a box pops up and says "Critical Error". What does that mean? I did not error. I just typed. What am I supposed to do now? It does not tell me. It just kind of in my face – ERROR. You can just hear that lil computer demon say, "And just try to do any more! Ha! I win!" It does not really say that. That is just in my imagination, because I crave a hassle free work time.

Then there is the car engine light. Give me gauges any day. The red light comes on and says, "Check engine." I pull over and pop the hood and check it. Yep, it is still there. Now what? We should be glad God is not as unspecific as my computer or my trouble light. He tells me exactly what is wrong. He says, "I can tell you why you are in this quarrel. I have examined your heart. (Psalm 139:23-24) It has a disease called sinful craving. Your wanter is broke. It wants the wrong things."

Thank God He tells me the truth. I keep lying about the situation. Look at Cain after he killed Able. (Genesis 4:8-9) Until God showed up He probably was thinking, "Who did he think he was? I worked harder for my sacrifice than he did. Little rat did not deserve to live." God shows up and asks where Abel is. "How would I know? I am

**Commented [notes16]:** <sup>23</sup> Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

<sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.  
Psalms 139:23-24 (NIV)

**Commented [notes17]:** Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.  
<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"  
Genesis 4:8-9 (NIV)

not his manager," Cain says. Then God opens up Cain's evil heart and shows it to him. (Genesis 4:10) We are never as spiritual as we think. We are not as mature, wise, or altruistic as we would like to imagine.

**Commented [notes18]:** <sup>10</sup> The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.  
Genesis 4:10 (NIV)

God has given us specific insight into why we fight and quarrel so we do not go around deceiving ourselves. That helps us identify it, confess it, and receive His forgiveness. (1 John 1:9) It also helps us be alert to it in the future. Then, by God's grace we can deal with it and develop righteousness in its place. Then we can fight the right fight. You see, the real battle is our cravings, not one another.

**Commented [notes19]:** <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.  
1 John 1:9 (NIV)

Identifying the craving is the first step to solving relational conflicts. It is worse than you think and it is simpler than you think. You might say, "Yeah, right, but how am I going to live this one? Sounds impossible." Look at verse 10. <sup>10</sup> *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. It is easier than you think.* Resolving conflict is easier than you think. Humble yourself first. Then the Lord will exalt you. When you are willing to see your part in the problem, you are open to letting God help you. Too often, we focus on how we can change the other party. That is a total waste of time. You can only change yourself. (Psalm 51:10) The good news is if you are willing to admit to God you need help, He will exalt you! It is a promise!

**Commented [notes20]:** <sup>10</sup> Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Psalms 51:10 (NIV)

If you really understand what James is saying here, it should not be that difficult. My opponent is not just the one on the other side of the argument; it is God. He resists the proud. Sin is conflict with God first and foremost. I have to get it right with Him before I have any hope of getting things right with people. When we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us. That confession means we are genuinely convicted and willing to change. It is only that easy because it was so hard on the One who took my place. He resolved the most serious conflict in my life, the one I had with God. (Romans 5:1)

**Commented [notes21]:** <sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,  
Romans 5:1 (NIV)

Now that you are right with God, you can confess to man as well. (James 5:16) Go ahead and really humble yourself by telling the person why you were quarreling. Be specific. Be brief. A long explanation means you are justifying your sin, requesting understanding for it, excusing it. When your confession is specific, sincere, and short, you will probably find the other person sympathetic. Conflict gone!

**Commented [notes22]:** <sup>16</sup> Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.  
James 5:16 (NIV)

Remember the beam and the speck? (Matthew 7:3-5) Jesus always encourages us to see our faults first. We cannot help anyone else until we do. Yes, resolving conflict is easier than you think. Humble yourself before the Lord and then before others.

**Commented [notes23]:** <sup>3</sup> "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?  
<sup>4</sup> How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?  
<sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.  
Matthew 7:3-5 (NIV)

It is coming... Relational conflict is headed to your front door. (Matthew 18:7) Now you know the source. You know it is worse than you think. Jesus said hatred is tantamount to murder. You know it is simpler than you think. It is not complicated or irresolvable. And it is easier than you think. The solution is to humble yourself and get right with God. Identify the craving and forsake it. Then humble yourself to the other person, confess, and ask for forgiveness. It is that easy.

**Commented [notes24]:** <sup>7</sup> "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!  
Matthew 18:7 (NIV)